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Sweet Summer Land

FLORENCE WATSON

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Sweet Summer Land.

AN IDYL.

BY

MRS. FLORENCE WATSON.

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BY

MRS. FLORENCE WATSON.

TO

MY HUSBAND,

Whose Companionship, Sympathy and Kindly Love are my greatest earthly blessings, this poem is Affectionately Inscribed, with the consciousness that, poetically, my endeavors have come too short of my desires.

F. W.

Sweet Summer Land.

BY MRS. FLORENCE WATSON

HE Winter, chilling to the veins,
And Spring, so full of fitful rains,
Are conquered by the winning grace
And sunshine of the Summer's face,
Have given up their gloomy reign—
And Summer Sweet is Queen again!
She calls the birds, with gentle voice:
"Come, birdies, come; with me rejoice—
With me be glad, be gay, be bright!
I've changed the earth from gloom to light;
I've spread a green robe for your feet,
And clothed each tree and shrub complete
With leafy verdure, rich and neat.
I've waked the drowsy, sleeping sod,

And Nature—wondrous work of God
Brings from her store-house garlands fine,
And decorates this land of mine.
Her colors sparkle everywhere,
On hill, in vale and woodland fair;
And all along my garments' hem
She fastened many a budding gem
Of gleaming purple Amethyst,
And dewy turquoise, violet kissed;
Of pearls and brilliant garnets bright,
Sapphires with mild translucent light—
Emeralds clear, and opals cold—
And yellow daisy stars of gold,
Shining, as though dropped through the bars
Of heaven, in a shower of stars,
Or like the apples on the trees
Watched over by Hesperides."
And calling thus with loving voice,
The birdies hear her and rejoice
To come away from a far clime

Where they were banished for a time
By the bleak breath that winter sends
To chase away the Summer's friends:
And in these halcyon, sunny days
They fill the air with rapturous lays
That echo sweetly, purely clear,
In transports to the ravished ear.
Once more the foliage decks the vine
That 'round the old porch doth entwine.
With clinging tendrils, creeping o'er
The lattice work around the door,
Reaching across the window's edge
It points toward the poplar hedge
That rears aloft its slender spires,
All trembling in the winds' desires.
The leaves of glossy greenness rare,
Seem part and parcel of the air
That waves the leaflets to and fro—
That comes from whence no one doth know,
And goeth whither none can go.

EHOLD the flower garden bright!
A gladsome satisfying sight—
Where modest pinks blush 'neath the eye
Of flaming coxcomb waving high,
And thoughtful pansies nod their heads
To us from out their shady beds.
The sweet alyssum, mignonette;
The cypress—symbol of regret—
Grows close beside the rivulet
That runs its slender thread across
The garden, like a gleam of floss.
The rose geranium fragrant stands—
Its leaves outspread like little hands
In benediction raised to bless
The flowers that grow, and bloom scentless.
The rich perfume it sends abroad—
A special gift to it from God—
Freely received is freely given,
Thus teaching us a law of heaven.
The green syringa bushes, tall,

That lean against the inner wall,
Are full of waxen blossoms white;
And down the walk, toward the right,
Blooms heliotrope, verbena, phlox,
And variegated four-o'clocks
That open wide their languid eyes
When day declines and sunlight flies.
While to the left the lily blows
In quiet grace and cool repose,
And just beyond, the brier rose.
Here, in the brightest sunniest spots,
Are blue-bells and forget-me-nots;
The color of their azure eyes,
The sweet reflections from the skies.
From out a moss-embowered urn
Grows maiden-hair and other fern,
Their fringy lashes quivering
With gladness, as they gently swing
Backward, and forward, in the breath
That Summer wafts to them, as 'neath
The sunny dome she wanders forth
To cheer, and beautify the earth.

ND here the arbor—where the vine
Of ivy and clematis twine
Like love's endeared companionship
Of heart to heart, or lip to lip—
Inviting stands to welcome those
Who seek its shelter and repose.
An aged man, with snow-white hair,
Often is seen to enter there,
And occupy its rustic chair.
In calm enjoyment underneath
The leafy, tangled, clinging wreath
That close shuts out the sun's hot rays.
He sits and dreams of other days,
Of other scenes, and other flowers,
Unmindful of the passing hours.
In blest reflections of content
The past is with the present blent.
There glides before his vision dim
The friends that childhood gave to him;
He seems again a boy with boys,
At play with bat, and ball, and toys,

At hide and seek; happy are they
As robins in the month of May,
Whose present joys of keen delight
Hides the dark future from their sight—
That future when some hunter grim
Shall aim a shot at heart or limb—
A shot unerring in its skill—
That *wounds* where 'er it fails to kill.

And then to him comes manhood's years,
So fraught with varied hopes, and fears,
A lover in his early prime,
He woos, again, his Madaline,
Who, when she's won and wedded, seems
The ideal of his pictured dreams—
A helpmate in the truest sense—
Giving his heart sweet recompense
Of love, for love's divine incense.
His home is better, brighter far
Than fame or fortune's beck'ning star;
And his young children clustered there,
Under his kind protecting care,

Are taught by precept and example
To choose the right, the wrong to trample;
To live at peace with one another
And all mankind. While she, their mother—
The gentle, patient, loving guide—
Dearer to him than aught beside,
Opens the Book divinely given,
And teaches them the way to heaven.
At evening, when the day is done,
She hears the prayers of each dear one;
Clasps their fair forms in close embrace,
Imprints a kiss upon each face,
Then leaves them in their beds to sleep,
Praying, "Darlings, may you God keep."

HEN comes a time—a dreary time—
When clouds shuts out the home sunshine.
The eldest born—a noble boy,
A source of comfort, pride and joy—
Sickens and dies, and leaves the fold,
His age scarce thirteen years—all told.

(*Soliloquy.*)

"So young, so beautiful, so fair,
(With gleams of sunlight in his hair,)
Our joy was he, our heart's delight.
With happy face a-beaming bright,
He left us one Spring morn', to play
With little comrades 'cross the way.
We knew not that a fell disease
Was floating in the passing breeze—
That his dear face would soon be hid
Under the folds of a coffin lid.

He came from play at evening time,
When vesper bells rang out their chime,
His dark eyes gleaming with a light
That shone unnaturally bright;

The fever hue burned in his cheek,
And in the space of one short week
His eyelids closed; his fleeting breath
Was stilled by that dread victor, Death;
And here he lies, his sweet face hid
Under the folds of a coffin lid.

Yes, he is gone, our earliest joy,
Our darling, dark-eyed, manly boy;
God called him home because 'twas best
To take him up where angels rest
In fields elysium, heaven's own land;
Beyond the borders of time's strand,
Where saints enjoy the heavenly day.
This, that remains, is naught but clay,
Which lieth here from our sight hid
Under the folds of a coffin lid.

Lord, yet we pray, 'Thy will be done!'
Though lonely now we journey on.
We know, to mourn for him is vain,
To live is loss, to die is gain.
Still lead us, Father, unto Thee,
Where, from all suffering set free,
We'll praise Thy name on that blest shore
Where death and parting is no more,
Where faces nevermore are hid
Under the folds of a coffin lid."

HE scene is shifted, and again
Comes weary days of loss and pain;
Other dear ones leave the home nest
To seek the land of endless rest.
She, who had been his helpful guide,
No longer lingers by his side.
The light has vanished; she has gone;
Earth's shadows deep, have darker grown
Around him, and he walks alone.
Yet trusts that, in the world divine,
Her light will never cease to shine;
That with the loved ones she awaits
The opening of the Opal Gates,
When he shall enter, join the throng,
And sing with them that wondrous song
Which heaven's angels love to sing
Around the throne of God our King.
He passes his declining days
With Amy—daughter dear in ways
Of kindness and humility—
Whose children climb their grandsire's knee,

With loving words of childish glee.
Old age, for him, is full of peace.
His heart has learned the sweet surcease
Of sorrow; and he waits the change
With resignation passing strange—
A resignation which shall tell
In hour of death that "all is well."

Beyond the flower-garden, where
The orchard trees wave in the air,
All nature smileth, calm and fair.
The Astrachans, with cheeks of red,
Glance down at us from overhead,
While at our feet the clover blooms
Send outward honeyed perfumes,
Tempting the bees from out their hive
Until the blossoms are alive
With them; each working with a will,
Extracting sweets with wondrous skill,
Or flying back and forth the while.
In just the same old-fashioned style
Of dress, and manner, that they had
When the first honeycomb was made.

And in the pasture meadow green,
The cows, all busily, are seen
With heads bent downward to the ground,
Eating the grass that there is found;
Or wandering onward to the brook,
Where, in a shady, sheltered nook,
They drink their fill, contented quite,
With not a care from morn to night.
The world to them is never strange,
No matter how the seasons change.
In Summer's sun, or Winter's chill,
'Tis but the same world to them still.
Just so they get their daily feed
They have no other wish or need,
And to the slaughter they are led
Without a fear of death, or dead.
Year after year they are the same,
Without a thought from whence they came,
Or whither go they at the last,
When life's declining day is past.
But *man lives, moves and has his being*
With mind far-reaching and far-seeing;
With brain that thoughtfully invents

Wonderful fashioned instruments
Of curious workmanship complete,
From microscope to engine neat,
From pleasure boat to steamer fleet;
And these, the careful, willing hand,
Perfected after they were planned—
Ah! tell me not, thou Infidel,
There is no Heaven where Spirits dwell,
No God, no living soul divine!
Are *we* not better far than *kine?*
Are *we* not conscious of a power
Within, and with us every hour,
Which teaches us we are superior
To creatures made so much inferior?
No cares have *they*, no doubts, no fears,
No vain regrets for vanished years;
No looking forward to a change
Beyond the earthly visions range.
We conscious live; and by and by,
Our bodies fail us and we die;
But *something* tells our hearts within,
That we shall surely live again,
To which we answer YEA, AMEN!

EE yonder hilltops! How they gleam
With brightness, in the morning's beam
That smiles upon a charming town
Within a valley slanting down
Toward a happy, singing river
Where prisoned sun rays leap and quiver
Through branches of the trees of beech
That stretch their arms as if to reach
Each other 'cross the shining stream.
That flows its shady banks between.
The dwellers of this pleasant town,
Content to live without renown,
Have wealth of kindness and good deeds
To give to him that really needs;
And never have the sick, or poor,
Been turned unmindful from their door.
Blest charity, with open hands,
Beside each fireside meekly stands
To soothe, to comfort and to bless
The ones who seek her comfortless.
Alternate joys and sorrows meet,

And births and deaths their tales repeat.
Pain, gladness, suffering and mirth,
Are here, as everywhere on earth,
And people live from year to year
With much to hope for, little to fear.

Across the bridge and up the hill
A silent city, lone and still,
Stands out against the Summer sky,
In solemn, quiet sanctity.
No noise is heard within its streets,
No joyous steps, no low heart beats.
No men of business come and go,
As in that village just below.
No laughter ever greets the ear,
No sob nor moan. No falling tear
Is seen, for all the dwellers there,
Forever freed from grief and care,
Peacefully rest with folded hands
In silence that the grave commands.
The spires that point their gleaming white
Skyward, so spectral day and night,
Marks lowly homes where dear ones sleep—

Dear ones whom in our hearts we keep
Though they be dead. ('Tis memory kind
That brings their faces thus to mind.)
The poor man is companion there
Of he whose life had little care.
Each share alike, *six feet of earth*,
Which shows what fleshly pride is worth,
And is the one estate which man
Inherits, since the world began.
Oft' times, when Summer days are fair,
I wander 'mong the head-stones there,
Or sit beside the hillocks green
Beneath whose low roofs, all unseen,
The vacant tenements of clay
Are waiting for the Judgment Day—
O Mystery! O Mystery!
Of Life! Of Death! I long to see—
Not through a glass thus darkly dim,
But face to face with HIM, with HIM—
The All Wise One who knows the end
From the beginning. Guide and Friend,
O lead our feeble steps aright
Onward and upward to the light
That shineth on the soul at last
When earthly mists and doubts are past.

EYOND the graveyard is the wood,
Within whose peaceful solitude
Are shady dells of cool delight,
And beauty, pleasing to the sight—
Beauty that soul of poet loves—
Of leafy vales, of ferny groves
That wave their feathery fingered palms,
Gracefully making low salaams
To one another 'neath the trees
That whisper o'er them in the breeze.
And here, and there, we come across
Green patches of the woodland moss
Like silken velvet, soft and clean,
And fit for any king or queen
To kneel upon in robes of State,
And yield their homage to the Great
Good King of all, who reigns supreme
O'er them—o'er earth, tho' all unseen
By our weak sights; and who is near
In spirit, when we bow in prayer,
In fields, or woods, or anywhere.

Secluded from the haunts of men,
We gaze on Nature's diadem
Of dark rich foliage overhead,
Content to lie within the shade
Refreshing coolness wafted down
To those who rest beneath its crown.
We hear the wild bird's happy song
Echoing sweetly, clear and strong,
And catch a glimpse of azure sky,
As trees wave and the breeze goes by
Loitering here, day after day,
We wish 'twere Summer time alway,
With naught but woods, and birds, and flowers,
To while away the quiet hours.
With naught but blue sky overhead,
Beneath us this green mossy bed,
And in our hearts a deep content,
That seems a boon from heaven sent,
A benediction given—not lent.

BUT changes over-shadow all:
The sunlight fades, the damp dews fall,
The tear-drops wet our cheeks, and in
The blue expanse of heaven are seen
Shadows fast gathering, one by one,
Shutting from sight the glorious sun.

(*The Storm.*)

Dense clouds are drifting 'cross the sky
As weary night comes hast'ning down;
The wailing wind sends forth a sigh
O'er country homes and neighboring town.
A storm is pending: See the scroll
Unfolding outward in the west;
And upward now the great clouds roll
Like dark foam on the black lake's crest.
And hark! The deafening thunders peal;
The vivid lightnings flare and flash;
The very heavens rock and reel
As down the angry waters dash;
Earth, storm and sky, all seem to blend
In one great mass, as the rains descend.

Down, down it pours, the mighty shower;
The rushing wind grows loud and strong,
The treetops bend beneath its power
As it whirls the weeping clouds along.
All nature seems to be at war,
Fighting for a great victory,
With bayonets' flash and cannons' roar,
Until the vanquished turn and flee—
Quite unafraid I watch the fight,
Knowing full well that it will cease
And leave the tired, troubled night
To waken into morning peace.
We scarce shall know a storm has passed
Since the sun shone upon us last.

Already it abates: It hath
Grown weary, and the wind lulls mild.
The elements have spent their wrath,
Are fast becoming reconciled.
The clouds uplift, the stars appear
Like gems of golden, dazzling light;
The shining north rays pale and clear,
Makes beautiful the Summer night.

While in the west a new moon bends
It's silver cresent o'er the wood.
The rain is past: All nature blends
Together now in quietude.
The moist earth rests secure and calm
Beneath the great sky's cooling palm.

Doth not this storm resemble life?
Clouds gather o'er us, one by one,
Filling our hearts with fear and strife,
Until our troubled course is run.
We cannot see the bright stars gleam
Until the blinding rain is o'er,
Nor get beyond Time's turbid stream
Between us and the unseen shore—
Then let the tempest rage and blow,
For thus 'tis soonest over—past;
The wildest storms more quickly go
Before the wildest, fiercest blasts.
The sweetest calm, the brighest stars,
Are just beyond earth's prison bars.

SUMMER, Summer, Summer Sweet!
Your verdure green beneath our feet,
Your radiant skies, your amber hours,
Are fairer after thunder showers.
So it must be that clouds are sent
To teach *us* lessons of content—
To teach us that, tho' storms do roar,
It will be brighter when they're o'er
And we have reached the restful shore.

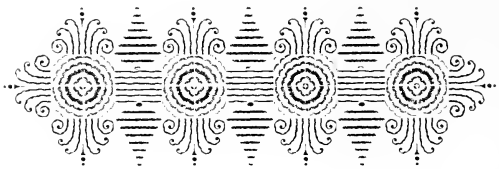
The Summer Land forever bright,
Where angels walk in garments white
Beside the river's golden strand.
Sweet Summer Land! Sweet Summer Land!

Where all are free from care and sin,
From foes without, from fears within;
Forever resting heart and hand.
Sweet Summer Land! Sweet Summer Land!

Where flowers eternal bloom for you—
The fadeless Summers through and through—
Our loved ones of the seraph band—
Sweet Summer Land! Sweet Summer Land!

That beauteous country, where the breath
Of Winter's chill—of Autumn's death—
Can never reach thy sunny strand
Sweet Summer Land! Sweet Summer Land!

Where all with God are truly blest,
As 'neath His smile, secure they rest.
With Angels walking, hand in hand,
In that unending Summer Land.



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